WARMINSTER RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Medical Officer's Annual Report, 1896.

To the Chairman Rural District Council, Warminster.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—It is once more my duty to present to you my annual report as to the health and sanitary condition of the district during the past year, together with a summary of the work done. During the past year the number of deaths registered was 79, to which must be added the deaths of six persons, belonging to the district, who died at the Warminster Cottage Hospital and Workhouse, thus bringing the total number to 85, which gives a death-rate on the population, estimated to the middle of 1896, as requested by Professor Smith, of 11.1 per 1,000. There is nothing special to remark in the list of deaths, except to notice the deaths of eleven persons from phthisis, and to mention that only one death occurred from infectious disease, and that a case of diphtheria in a very young child. The following table epitomises the ages at which death occurred throughout the district:—Under 1 year, 9; over 1 year and under 5 years, 5; over 5 years and under 15 years, 1; over 15 years and under 25 years, 3; over 25 years and under 65 years, 29; over 65 years, 38—total, 85. The births numbered 152, equal to a birth-rate of exactly 20 per 1,000, calculated on the estimated population to the middle of 1896. I have no doubt that the population as returned at the last census is much more correct at the present time than the estimated one. Outbreaks of scarlet fever occurred at Corsley and Imber; at the former place six separate households were infected, and although in most of these households there were a number of children, only one member of each family took the disease. The schools at the time of the outbreak were closed for the Whitsuntide holidays, and although there was no evidence of the disease having originated at the schools, still I thought it better to have them thoroughly disinfected, which was accordingly done, and I assented to the schools being opened at the usual time, certain families being prohibited from attending, but the managers were adverse to opening the schools and ordered them to be closed for a further period of four weeks. The outbreak at Imber was confined to a couple of households, and was of a very mild character; isolated cases also occurred at Corton and Heytesbury. Solitary cases of diphtheria were reported to me at Sutton Veny, Codford, Heytesbury, Corsley, Crockerton, and Bishopstrow, one of which proved fatal. One case of imported enteric fever was notified to me. All these cases were visited by me, and prompt measures as to the isolation and disinfection prevented them becoming epidemic. The villages have been regularly inspected, and in some cases house to house visitations of the cottages are made, and the result of these inspections are regularly reported to the Council at their meetings. The cottages in some of the villages are very defective, being antiquated, badly constructed, damp, and devoid of proper ventilation. I think the worst cottages are to be found in the parishes of Chitterne and Sherrington. At my inspection of the latter village I reported two cottages as unfit for habitation, and others as requiring substantial repairs. The water supply has been abundant throughout the year, two new wells have been opened, one at Crockerton and one at Corsley, and orders have been given for the cleaning and repair of others. Shallow wells are the rule in the Deverill district, and the majority of them get very polluted from surface water in stormy weather. As mentioned in my previous report, the river Wylye is polluted by sewage matter from the various villages it passes through, more especially from the village of Heytesbury, where most of the closets in the High-street drain into the river. The question of providing an infectious hospital for the district has been under discussion, and no doubt it would be an immense advantage if there were an hospital to which cases of an infectious nature could be removed; but in such a scattered district one such hospital would be of little service, the only plan I can suggest being to endeavour to make arrangements with the Urban Council to admit cases to their hospital when possible; but I am afraid the Urban Council would not entertain such a proposal, and I do not think your Council will agree to amalgamate with them in building a joint hospital. The bakehouses and slaughterhouses have been regularly inspected, and great attention has been paid to the registration of dairies, many of which did not come under our notice; but I think that all dairies in the district are now registered, after inspection by myself and the Sanitary Office. No common lodging-house exists in the district, and no offensive trades are carried on. I beg to submit with this report the tables furnished by the Local Government Board dealing with the mortality and prevalence of infections in the district during the past year, which statistics are, I think, most satisfactory.—I am, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, yours faithfully, FRED. I. FLOWER, Medical Officer of Health for the Warminster Rural District.

Warminster, January 27th, 1897.